

### [The Arizona Republic](#)

#### Editorial

Freshman Congressman Harry Mitchell, D-Tempe, is cutting a path as an independent thinker, voting against Democratic bills when they don't make sense to him. He's leading a Quixotic effort to [roll back a House pay raise](#), for instance, and [co-sponsoring a bill to make lower capital gains and estate taxes permanent](#).

But he's smart enough not to buck one longstanding tradition - adding local projects to the transportation appropriations bill.

The bill passed the House last week, with \$700,000 for two Scottsdale projects, \$90 million for 19.6 miles of light-rail construction, \$1.1 million for four Valley Metro transit projects and \$1.3 million to add a taxiway at Williams Gateway Airport in Mesa. The light-rail construction was included in President Bush's budget proposal.

The Scottsdale projects include \$500,000 toward widening and raising Indian Bend Road over its namesake wash, and \$200,000 for a transit center at SkySong.

There's a legitimate question as to what federal interest is advanced by making it easier for drivers to use a Scottsdale street or to park bicycles at a research park. The same question can be asked about most earmarks in the bill, from Maine to Hawaii. And that's really what Mitchell has to confront: Does it change anything if he refuses to play this game? The answer, sadly, is no. The \$700,000 coming to Scottsdale would simply go somewhere else.

Until the system changes - something Republican Rep. Jeff Flake has tried tirelessly, but unsuccessfully, to do - Mitchell's job is to make sure the 5th District gets its share. The projects he included are legitimate, serving real needs. They're not an Alaskan bridge to nowhere, the poster child for budgetary abuse.

Scottsdale has money from Bond 2000 and the transportation sales tax to cover the Indian Bend project. The federal money - appropriate because the project involves a flood-control channel overseen by a federal agency, city spokesman Patrick Dodds said - will allow the city to shift local money to other transportation projects. It's a good way to leverage resources.

The federal government funds transit projects just as it pays for highway construction. The SkySong transit center fits that category. The city asked for \$1.5 million, but received \$200,000. Some local revenue is earmarked, but not enough to finish the project. If Congress does not come through with more money later, the city will have to find additional money, Dodds said.

Mitchell understands this. We expect he'll do his best to close the gap, because he understands there's a big difference between money for congressional pay raises and funds for construction

projects in his district. He's choosing the right side in these battles.